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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitudes and perceptions of four white fifth graders in a southeastern U.S. state toward gender roles and expectations after reading and discussing children's literature that portrayed females and males in diverse, nontraditional roles. Prior to the study, the students completed an art expression activity to assess their attitudes. From this, the researchers selected appropriate literature and identified areas of need. This art activity was conducted a second time subsequent to the literature and discussion sessions to examine signs of growths. Data came from student interviews, observations, field notes, student writings and art products, and audiotaped literature discussions. Results indicated that all four students' attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and expectations were positively influenced through the reading and discussing of children's literature with characters in gender equitable roles. Students acknowledged the importance of gender equity and recognized the limitations gender stereotyping can exert on people's ambitions, interests, and behaviors. They looked within themselves for answers to the problems plaguing the characters, people within their environments, and themselves. (Contains 61 references.) (SM)

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND GENDER ROLES

EXPLORING THE USE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO IMPACT THE GENDER ROLE EXPECTATIONS OF FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS

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And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any casual tale which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we wish them to have when they are grown up? We cannot...anything received into the mind at this age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the tales which the young reader first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts.... (Plato, 1991, p. 72)

The ever-changing landscape of gender roles in today's society calls for an attitude of awareness and possibility. Gender stereotyping hampers both females and males. The limitations placed on members of society based on gender often stifle creativity, emotion, interest, and potential. It is incumbent for educators to consider the impact of the roles placed on children through the media, peer interactions, adult modeling, and school curriculum.

Attitudes toward gender are an integral part of our persona. They play a part in defining who we are as individuals, how we perceive others and ourselves and interpret the world around us (Marshall, Robeson, & Keefe, 1999). Gender, often confused with the biological factor of being labeled female or male, otherwise known as sex (Voorhees, 1994), is developed over time through personal experiences, societal and personal expectations, and cultural influences (Voorhees, 1994; Martinez & Nash, 1993). This evolutionary process takes place over the course of a lifetime, but the foundation is laid in the early years (Flerx, Fidler, & Rogers, 1976). Our gender schemata, background knowledge of what it means to be a female or a male in a particular society based on experiences (Marshall et al., 1999), is a strong factor in our decision-making processes, emotional responses, occupational opportunities and pursuits, personal appearances, and areas of interest (Flerx et al., 1976; Trepanier-Street & Romanowski, 1999; Voorhees, 1994). Gender issues are of great concern for many educators due to the influence gender and the attitudes surrounding it have on students' performance, areas of interest, and self-concept.

When attitudes toward gender are skewed due to inaccurate representations of society, oftentimes creativity and potential are stifled (Trepanier-Street & Romanowski, 1999; Fox, 1993; Marshall et al., 1999; Kohler & Zumwalt, 1998; Leinhardt, Seewald, & Engel, 1979). Societal views toward gender are sent

through a variety of messengers such as family, educational environments, media, peers, and culture (Russell, 2001; Martinez & Nash, 1993; Marshall et al., 1999; Dougherty & Engel, 1987; Derman-Sparks & ABC Taskforce, 1989; Lehr, 2001; Wood, 1994; Chatton, 2001).

The role of the school is to prepare students to be active citizens in the society of which they are members (Grant & Sleeter, 1998). Schools perpetuate the norms established by society and the home (Lynch, 1975), and the ideals espoused in the educational systems are framed around the purpose of education: to teach students to think (Baldwin, 1985). Schools have a considerable impact on the development of an individual's self-concept and the opportunities available to her/him in the future (Wood, 1994), and educational institutions are beginning to focus on the influential role they play, rivaled only by the home and religious institutions (Grant & Sleeter, 1998). When children begin their formal education, the school, its curriculum and teachers, take a primary role in the socialization process (Yates, 1997; Lynch, 1975; Wood, 1994; Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989; Grossman & Grossman, 1994; Marshall et al., 1999).

The materials presented in a classroom are often filled with stereotypical depictions of females and males (McGee-Bailey, 1993; Grossman & Grossman, 1994; Voorhees, 1994; Lynch, 1975; Smith, Greenlaw, & Scott, 1987). Teachers, who are unaware of the importance of gender equity, "a set of actions, attitudes, and assumptions that provide opportunities and create expectations about individuals" (Women's Equity Resource Center, 2002, p.1), consciously and unconsciously communicate expected societal roles to their students. These values and ideals are inculcated into the students' gender schemata and then are played out in future situations and experiences.

Teachers, as transmitters of culture and knowledge, have an obligation to the well-being of their students and should, therefore, present an unbiased view of the genders. Teacher intervention has the power to change stereotypical patterns when gender stereotypical behaviors and attitudes are directly addressed and by encouraging broader thinking through books selected for class, chores assigned, and personal traits that are reinforced (Schneidewind & Davidson, 1998). Sleeter (1991) advocates a transformative curriculum that includes gender within all subject areas in an attempt to develop knowledge and critical thinking and reflection. This teacher responsibility is accomplished by "convey[ing] images, perspectives, and points of

view that will demystify social realities and promote cultural freedom and empowerment” (Sleeter, 1991, p. 139). When opportunities for discussion, equitable literature selection, times of reflection and questioning are available, students have the ability to identify stereotypes and address them (Jett-Simpson & Masland, 1993).

The past three decades have seen an increased interest in equity between the genders. Initially the concern started as an effort to create equality, sameness for all, but as research and interest grew, the focus became gender equity, the idea that females and males are biologically and educationally different and, therefore, should be treated accordingly (Grossman & Grossman, 1994). Organizations and legislation; Women’s Educational Equity Act (WEEA), American Association of University Women (AAUW), National Organization for Women (NOW), Gender Equity in Education Act (GEEA) and Title IX, have been created and federally and privately funded to support research and the dissemination of knowledge and information for the betterment of all people, female and male. Initially the push for equity focused mainly on adult issues but has since encompassed a concern for the fate of future generations.

The authors are both members of a generation that has been touched by feminism and issues of gender equity. The primary researcher was raised as an independent, athletic, Southern female, who has encountered sexism, ostracism, and struggles, but also the triumphs, support, and pride that accompany nontraditional female pursuits. These experiences, coupled with knowledge of the new scholarship on women (Bryan, 2000), inspired her to further her education and inform others, especially educators, about the dangers of gender role stereotyping and the possibility of positive change for the future through the power of language, specifically children’s literature.

While research has been conducted on the stereotypical content of children’s literature (Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, & Ross, 1972; Collins, Ingoldsby, & Dellman, 1984; Dellman-Jenkins, Florjanic, & Swadener, 1993; Dougherty & Engel, 1987; Lehr, 2001), the interactions between teacher and student (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Leinhardt et al., 1979; Lynch, 1975), and the use of children’s literature to affect attitudes toward occupational roles (Dresner, 2000; Mayer, 1998; Black, 1997; Trepanier-Street & Romantowski, 1999); there appears to be a lack of cohesiveness and long-term descriptive studies

approaching gender equity through the lens of children's literature. The studies, typically quantitative in design, tend to address one aspect of a child's attitude as opposed to encompassing the whole child. This qualitative case study of fifth-grade students' reactions to gender equitable literature in reference to emotional response, family and occupational roles, personal traits, and fields of interest and activity was an effort to complement the empirical data collected. The problem investigated was how children's literature could successfully be used to positively influence attitudes about gender roles and expectations.

The results of this study and its implications are intended to inform teachers and curriculum coordinators about the importance of gender equity issues and the successful use of children's literature as a tool for promoting positive gender attitudes.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the constructivist theory of learning (Aldridge & Eddowes, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Kamii & Ewing, 1996), and Feminist Pedagogy, together with a combination of the beliefs of Social Reconstructivism and the Human Relations Approach to teaching.

The constructivist approach to learning involves the assimilation of knowledge through reflection and experiences (Kamii & Ewing, 1996). This type of learning occurs when students are given opportunities to develop a strong and "sophisticated appreciation of the nature and limitations of knowledge and understand the extent to which knowledge is a social construction that reflects social, political, and cultural content in which it is formulated" (Banks, 1991, p. 126).

Building on the belief that knowledge is constructed in the social, political, and cultural realms, feminist pedagogy extends this to include and emphasize the role, perspective, and contributions of females (Wood, 1994; Kazin, 2000). Feminist pedagogy seeks to help learners understand that knowledge must be viewed in context and that it contains both personal and emotional components. Acknowledging the learners' or knowers' position and background helps create a sense of purpose and personal connection with the material (Sleeter, 1991).

Social reconstruction is "the belief that schools in a democracy could and should prepare citizens to work actively and collectively on problems facing society" (Grant & Sleeter, 1998, p. 253). The goals

include making school relevant to the lives of the students within its walls and addressing social issues that hinder or constrain groups and individuals (Grant & Sleeter, 1998).

The Human Relations Approach seeks to establish communication and interaction among diverse groups in a nondiscriminatory manner (Grant & Sleeter, 1998). It focuses on respect in an effort to promote open lines of communication and acknowledgement of feelings and perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the attitudes and perceptions of four fifth-grade students in a southeastern state toward gender roles and expectations after reading and discussing children's literature portraying females and males in diverse, nontraditional roles.

This study was guided by the following overarching research question:

What are the attitudes and perceptions of four fifth-grade students toward gender equity after reading and participating in discussions about children's literature in which females and males are portrayed in diverse, nontraditional roles? Specifically, this research sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of fifth-grade girls toward gender roles and expectations after reading and participating in discussions about children's literature in which females and males are portrayed in diverse, nontraditional roles?
2. What are the attitudes and perceptions of fifth-grade boys toward gender roles and expectations after reading and participating in discussions about children's literature in which females and males are portrayed in diverse, nontraditional roles?
3. What changes emerge in pre-reading attitudes toward gender roles and expectations after implementation of intervention with gender equitable literature?
4. How do student literature circles and writing/art activities related to gender equitable children's literature reveal changes in fifth-grade students' attitudes and perceptions toward gender roles and expectations?

Procedures

This multiple instrumental case study explores and describes the effects of reading and discussing equitable children's literature and discussion on the attitudes and perceptions of four fifth-grade students toward gender issues. A multiple instrumental case study contains multiple cases that are described and compared to provide insight into a theme or issue (Creswell, 2002).

The site for the study was Fortenberry Elementary (a pseudonym), a K-5 school in middle Tennessee, with an enrollment of 588 students as of September 10, 2002. The pupil teacher ratio for fifth-grade was 22:1. The school was predominantly European American and students were from middle to high socioeconomic households. The fifth-grade teacher was given the pseudonym Ms. Harwell. The students in Ms. Harwell's classroom were of varied ability levels.

The specific county within the state of Tennessee was given the name Smellen County for this study. According to the 2000 census report, 91.6 % of inhabitants of the county were European American, 5.2 % were African American, 2.5 % were Hispanic, and 2.5 % were described as "Other". The educational status of the county is as follows: 24.5 % graduated high school, 21.7% attended some college, 5.4 % earned associate degrees, 22% earned bachelor's degrees, and 9.4% earned graduate degrees. In 1999, the per capita income was \$38,236 and the average household income was \$66,335 (Williamson County-Franklin Chamber of Commerce, 2002).

Participants

The four participants in this study were fifth-grade students, in Mrs. Harwell's class at Fortenberry Elementary School. The classroom teacher assisted in student selection based on observations and discussions. Students involved in the study were purposefully selected based on willingness to participate in class discussions, interviews, art and writing expression activities, and flexible attitudes toward gender. The selected students were both female and male in order to gain diverse perspectives.

The four students selected were given the pseudonyms Allison, Nan, Jon, and Charles. The students were of European American descent and were ten and eleven years old. The students were similar in that

they were open to new ideas and perspectives, but varied in interests, region of origin, and acceptance of diverse gender roles and expectations.

Allison was a well-mannered athletic fifth-grade girl who performed well in both the athletic and academic arenas. She was very close to her family and looked to them for modeling, advice, and support. She was well liked by her classmates and teachers. She was eager to complete assignments and activities accurately in order to fulfill her role as student. Allison was the daughter of athletic parents who worked in sales and athletic training and was one of three children. Allison cooperated well with her fellow classmates through compromise and dialogue.

Nan was a creative and energetic fifth-grade girl who strived to nurture and support her classmates and family. Nan was a strong student who enjoyed writing and art activities where she was allowed to let her imagination flow. Nan was the daughter of an accountant and homemaker and the older sister to her brother. She was very close with her family and exhibited a great deal of respect and admiration for them. She participated in figure skating competitions and enjoyed performing in the school play. Nan worked well with others and scaffolded their learning whenever possible through hints, suggestions, and encouragement.

Jon was an athletic fifth-grade boy who was very outgoing. Much like his parents who were athletic and employed in athletic professions, Jon intended to become a professional athlete. He was well liked by all of his classmates and teachers. His wit was part of his charm and often made up for his academic deficiencies. He was the middle child of three unique boys who were close, but independent. Jon was always ready to ease the tension of a situation and encourage others with kind words and a pat on the back.

Charles was the class resident artist with immense talent that was acknowledged by his classmates and teachers. His drawings and creations graced bulletin boards, folders, handouts, and sometimes even his hands or arms. Charles preferred art to writing, but was an above average student with great potential. Often the instigator of laughter and jokes, Charles' understanding of human nature shone through. Never short on comments and quips, Charles was a sensitive male in the disguise of a prankster. His twin brother was in the class next door and was also constantly joking with others, while his older brother was a serious and quiet

student with academics as his focus. Charles loved art, but also enjoyed playing various sports including soccer, football, and basketball.

Data Collection Methods

The collection of this data began after obtaining permission from the Human Subjects Review Committee at The University of Southern Mississippi and the principal of the participating school in Smellen County. Informed consent was also gained from parents through letters describing the study and its purpose. The study was conducted over the course of eight weeks during the fall, 2002, beginning on October 4, 2002 and continuing through November 26, 2002. During this period, the primary author spent 75 minutes with the students two days a week reading children's literature, promoting dialogue through whole and small group literature circles, response journal activities, and art reflection activities.

Prior to the commencement of the study, the students completed an art expression activity, designed by the primary author. The purpose of this activity was to assess attitudes to select appropriate literature and identify areas of need. This art expression activity was conducted a second time subsequent to the literature sessions to get an indication of signs of growth.

After participants completed the art reflection activity, students engaged in read alouds with the primary author. The students listened, discussed, and reflected on the message of the literature and the comments of peers. The students then participated in a responsive activity that connected with the literature experience. These responses were evaluated and categorized for demonstration of growth and expression of attitudes.

Observations were conducted to provide thick description and well-rounded depictions of the participants and the lessons. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to acquire information on attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and expectations. Response journals and artwork created in response to literature lessons were collected and analyzed.

During the course of this study, the primary author acted as a participant-observer (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). As a participant-observer, she facilitated student discourse through prompts and activities. Students were given journal and discussion topics to reflect upon and react to through dialogue, artistic

means, and writing. As participant observer, she also helped students make connections to their own lives through probing questions and references to school curriculum and personal experiences. This type of support promoted active learning and the internalization of literature as advocated by Louise Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1995), Lev Vygotsky's Social Construction Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), as well as Piaget's (Aldridge & Eddowes, 1994) and Dewey's (1897) ideas of constructivist learning.

The literature sessions were audio taped in order to accurately represent and analyze the content of the sessions. The audiotapes provided exact responses and revealed how revelations or insights were gained through constructivist learning environments. Field notes were generated from class observations and audio taped transcripts. These field notes were analyzed to identify constructs, themes, and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The field notes were used to record responses, actions, and demeanor of the classroom climate during the study, as well as personal reactions and questions to guide the future lessons in relation to student behaviors. As a participant observer, semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and expectations at varying points throughout the study. Like the field notes, this data also helped guide the direction of lessons and activities.

Data Analysis

The data collected was in the form of field notes, observations, student writings and art products, audio taped and transcribed literature discussions and interviews. The constant comparative method of analysis was used to analyze the data collected as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Stake (1994). Constant comparative method of data analysis consisted of collecting data, sorting it into patterns and themes, collecting new data, and then comparing it to the categories previously formed. This moved the data from specific to broad connections in order to generate categories (Creswell, 2002). Categorical aggregation was used in order to identify relevant issues through a number of related instances (Creswell, 1998). Questions that lead to further elaboration and specificity were developed as interview transcripts were analyzed throughout the study. The transcripts were color-coded to identify emerging themes, similar pieces of information that were grouped together to form a major idea (Creswell, 2002), or categories of interest or importance as recommended by Marshall and Rossman (1995) and Creswell (1998). The products created by

the participants were also coded for stereotypical or non-stereotypical characteristics. The patterns that emerged were used to form naturalistic generalizations in order for educators to recognize the uses and value of gender equitable literature as a tool for encouraging positive gender attitudes and perceptions in reference to gender roles and expectations (Creswell, 1998).

The following summarizes the data analysis process used:

- Looked for key words or ideas that were repeated.
- Found patterns in writing, art, and conversation to substantiate themes and categories.
- Constantly compared themes, patterns, throughout, to confirm or reject.
- Color Coded transcripts of semi-structured interviews and audio taped lessons.
- Field notes were written with observations of classroom behavior and responses in one column with connectors, personal observations, and future questions in other column.
- Peer review of data with graduate education student.

Verification of Data

The verification of this study involved peer review of data collected to confirm or dispute the formation of themes, patterns, or conclusions. Member checks were also conducted to confirm the credibility and accuracy of the interpretations. The information was triangulated to ensure consistency and support. The sources of data used in the triangulation process came from interviews, observations, and written products (Creswell, 2002; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The thick descriptions, as suggested by Creswell (1998), provided detail rich information that can be used in determining the transferability of the findings. An audit trail was conducted to ensure organization and quality of data gathering and analysis (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988).

Within case analysis, a “description of each case and themes within the case” and cross case analysis, “thematic analysis across the cases” within gender were used to determine the findings of this study (Creswell, 1998, p. 63).

Findings and Discussion

This investigation explored the overarching research question: *What are the attitudes and perceptions of four fifth-grade students toward gender equity after reading and participating in discussions*

about children's literature in which females and males are portrayed in diverse, nontraditional roles? using the theoretical framework of the constructivist theory of learning (Aldridge & Eddowes, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Kamii & Ewing, 1996), Feminist Pedagogy (Wood, 1994; Kazin, 2000), with a combination of the beliefs of Social Reconstructivism (Grant & Sleeter, 1998) and the Human Relations Approach (Grant & Sleeter, 1998) to teaching. The lessons created for this study introduced the students to social construction of learning through literature circles and whole group discussion, feminist pedagogy through the presentation of diverse, nontraditional characters, and both the Human Relations Approach to teaching and Social Reconstructivism by posing questions and looking for solutions or alternatives through journaling, artistic expression, and dialogue.

Research Question Synthesis

Research question one.

What are the attitudes and perceptions of fifth-grade girls toward gender roles and expectations after reading and participating in discussions about children's literature in which females and males are portrayed in diverse, nontraditional roles?

The literature lessons and accompanying discussions, writing and art activities enhanced the female students' perceptions and attitudes toward gender roles and expectations by exploring children's literature containing diverse, nontraditional characters through reading, dialogue, writing and art expression activities. Nan responded, "My whole perspective has changed about what boys and girls can do." She said, "I never thought about it the way Ms. Flynn made me think about it. I learned people's emotions are not determined by what they look like or what sex they are, but what they like and what they want to do." Allison remarked, "Girls are capable of doing the same things boys do and boys are capable of doing the same things girls do. They can both be whatever they want." This constructivist, literature based learning environment offered these students the opportunity to broaden their concepts of females and males through dialogue, personal experiences, the scaffolding of teacher and peers, and the relationships forged with the characters in the books and their fellow classmates (Rosenblatt, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, 1994; Kazin, 2000; Adderholt-Elliot & Eller, 1989; Adams & Pitre, 2000). As

the case study began, students felt they had a grasp of gender roles and expectations of females and males. Allison commented that women choose their professions "because they are easier and they don't have to do a lot with their hands. They can't build and fix a lot of things that guys can do. Men probably choose their jobs because they think it is probably manly and they don't want to be doing an easy job." At the close of the study, Allison remarked that females and males can the same jobs, but typically males worked in "dirty jobs" and females in "neater jobs." Nan also initially supplied traditional professions for both females and males. She responded that females are teachers or hair stylists and males can be a "garbage guy", author, or physical education teacher. At the conclusion of the study, Nan listed a much more diverse repertoire of professions for both females as aviators and inventors, and males as illustrators of books and "any kind of teacher." Allison and Nan's attitudes and perceptions of professional roles grew and they came to embrace more diverse professional pursuits of both men and women after participating in the reading, literature circles, and response activities through the media of journals and art (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, 1994; Kazin, 2000).

These students demonstrated their understanding of gender equity and the impact of gender stereotypes in their writings, dialogue with peers and teachers, and art activities. Both demonstrated the wide range of expectations for males and females in all areas addressed in this study. Nan and Allison commented on numerous occasions that stereotyping hurts others and keeps females and males from doing the things they are most interested in pursuing. After reading the stories to the students and allowing ample time for discussion and reflection, these students began to look at circumstances from different perspectives in an effort to empathize and resolve the situations. This is a reflection of the tenets of bibliotherapy where readers identify with the characters and/or events of the story, become "emotionally involved, literature can have the effect of mitigating emotional status" (Sridhar & Vaughn 2000, p. 75), and finally recognize her/his power to alter the situation so that it is no longer static (Stoudt-Hill, 2001).

While the girls responded similarly on many occasions, a difference emerged between the two students. Allison accepted gender equity on a more selective scale and failed to apply it to more than

surface situations at times. She often commented on the status of the characters and the injustice, but when asked to respond to a similar situation personally she revealed that she held herself and other females and males to the traditional standards with which she entered into the study. In her closing interview, Allison maintained that girls and boys are able to be or do what they desire, although she referenced traditional roles from which to deviate. She saw this type of diversity as more the exception than the rule. Allison steadily grew in the ideals of gender equity, but at a slower pace than her female counterpart.

In contrast, Nan embraced the ideals of gender equity more fully and found ways to apply them to her personal experiences. She connected with the texts and brought her experiences together with the author's words and illustrator's pictures to derive meaning in her own life. Nan began this journey with a mixed disposition toward gender roles and expectations, but ended with a firm grasp of how these ideals apply to her life and circumstances. Nan was able to specifically see how these lessons impact lives and how she would learn from them to make her world a better place. She stated, "Doing this [literature lessons and activities] also made me want to be the best that I can be."

Research question two.

What are the attitudes and perceptions of fifth-grade boys toward gender roles and expectations after reading and participating in discussions about children's literature in which females and males are portrayed in diverse, nontraditional roles? The literature lessons and accompanying discussions, writing and art activities enhanced the male students' perceptions and attitudes toward gender roles and expectations by exploring children's literature containing diverse, nontraditional characters through reading, discussion, writing and art expression activities. Charles articulated his belief system in the closing journal activity by writing, "It proves women do a lot more than men think, and it's not always fun. They [boys] don't always have to do sports and the boys' stuff, they can do other things that girls sometimes do. It is possible for boys to cry and get their feelings hurt and for girls to be strong and tough." His thoughts did not stop there. After reflecting for a moment he added, "Sometimes they are enemies and compete to prove who is smarter or better, but neither is really smarter or better." Charles' recognition of the struggles between females and

males and the reality of the situation is a testament to the enlightenment that occurred over the course of these eight weeks. Charles was not alone in his assessment of the gender situation. Jon remarked on the ability of females and males to pursue any avenue they choose. "I have learned anyone can do anything and anyone can be a basketball player or a nurse. Whatever you want to do or be you can do it. Whatever you set your mind to, you can do."

The initial interview revealed Charles' perception of women's professions. When asked what jobs women can have, Charles replied, "Usually I think they work around the house. I think some might be doctors or nurses. I guess a bunch are teachers." His reasoning was based on the ability of women to be models on television. He discounted the majority of women as not pretty enough to be models and the lack of women's sports on television as a motivation to have other professions. When referencing male careers, Charles immediately replied with sports related jobs because, "men are athletes because they are a bunch of boys who get all fired up and just want to run and catch a ball... and hit someone...." Throughout the lessons, Charles' attitudes toward roles and expectations of females and males broadened and he came to accept others in diverse activities. At times he even commented on how he was more than proficient at traditionally female activities such as sewing and fashion design. In his follow-up interview Charles remarked that he would pick on others who were different less because of what he had learned from the lessons presented in the case study. This growth of acceptance was a refreshing reminder of the power of bibliotherapy to use literature to speak to learners on a personal level (Rosenblatt, 1995; Sridhar & Vaughn 2000).

Jon was a fifth grader with traditional attitudes with an inkling of malleability. This opportunity to reach him was an important step in his growth toward more equitable attitudes. The initial interview demonstrated his views on home life and professions when he referenced housewives, male athletes bringing home the money, and women having to cook and clean while men watch television. During the literature lessons, Jon was able to hear other views from fellow classmates and the characters in the book. The empathy he exhibits toward his classmates was carried over into hypothetical situations related to the books' characters. His growth was evidenced in his responses to journal activities that allowed him to dialogue in literature circles then use the new information gained to form opinions and expectations for females and

males. In his final journal assessment for the lessons, he wrote, "My attitude has changed a lot. I used to say girls can't play this. But now I say sure, I bet you are good. It actually surprises me!" This budding interest and acceptance of gender equity is promising and can be scaffolded through experiences, dialogue, and activities that challenge the taken for granted norms of society (Bell, 1991).

Research question three.

What changes emerge in pre-reading attitudes toward gender roles and expectations after implementation of intervention with gender equitable literature?

Growth was demonstrated through the depiction of females and males in nontraditional roles in the art expression activity. The four students took part in an art expression activity prior to the literature intervention and after the conclusion of the lessons. The art expression activity required them to illustrate labels representing professions, emotional responses, roles in the home, and extracurricular activities through drawing and captions.

All four students showed traditional or a mixture of traditional and nontraditional roles in the pre-intervention art activity. The students illustrated labels including doctor, crying, cooking dinner, and basketball player. Allison, Nan, and Jon had both traditional and nontraditional representations for these labels, while Charles chose to depict his characters in all traditional roles. There was a great departure in the representations for Charles and Nan in the post assessment. Both Charles and Nan chose to portray each label with a female and male because, according to Nan in a member check (Creswell, 2002), "Well, a girl and a boy can be, do, and act the same. I thought I needed to show that." Allison and Jon remained consistent in their portrayals as both traditional and nontraditional representations for the labels.

The final journal also revealed growth on the part of these students in the area of gender equity. Nan wrote, "My whole perspective has changed about what boys and girls can do." She said, "I never thought about it the way Ms. Flynn made me think about it. I learned people's emotions are not determined by what they look like or what sex they are, but what they like and what they want to do." Allison noted how this new information and insight would enable her to counter anyone who attempted to convince her she was not capable of doing something in life that went against others' opinions of what a

girl should do. As stated previously, Charles responded by noting how his actions and attitudes would change now that he had considered different perspectives. Jon continued to be supportive and positive while noting that his judgment of others based on stereotypical assumptions had decreased and that he saw these lessons as valuable to his future in that he would be considered a more "accepting person."

In the post intervention interview the students replied with more diverse responses to questions concerning professions, hobbies, and home life. Students who had initially listed more traditional roles for females and males branched out and cataloged a diverse list of careers such as female secret agents and inventors, and male educators and illustrators.

All four students recognized the negative impact of gender stereotyping on the human psyche. All four commented that it was unfair, mean, and wrong of people to judge others based on their sex. The students felt the problem could be alleviated if people communicated, got to know one another, and felt more secure about themselves. The students linked this to working in groups during the lessons. The students responded to a question in reference to the literature circles and group discussions in class. All four believed it was valuable to listen and be heard by peers and adults. The students stated that when working in groups, they learned from and about one another. This constructivist climate created teachable moments and open lines of communication (Vygotsky, 1978; Kamii & Ewing, 1996; Grant & Sleeter, 1998).

Research question four.

How do student literature circles and writing/art activities related to gender equitable children's literature reveal changes in fifth-grade students' attitudes and perceptions toward gender roles and expectations?

As purported by the Human Relations Approach to teaching (Grant & Sleeter, 1998), communication in a nondiscriminatory manner among groups is the key to positive interaction. The students were given opportunities to work with classmates to create a dialogue for the discussion of topics covered during the course of the readings. All literature circles contained females and males to get varied perspectives on the assignments and situations. These opportunities provided students with an open forum to

express their ideas, debate solutions and motivations, and place to be heard. At the close of the case study, Nan, Jon, Charles, and Allison concurred that working in groups allowed them to express themselves, hear what others thought, and learn from one another. These open lines of communication created teachable moments for these students and opportunities to take control of their learning; constructivism at its essence (Vygotsky, 1978; Kamii & Ewing, 1996).

The writing activities related to each piece of literature allowed students to work through the dilemmas faced by the characters in the stories and sometimes themselves. As there were guided questions to address the issues, the students reflected on the circumstances and wrote in their journals about the topic at hand to maintain focus on the objectives of the lesson. Charles wrote, "You gave us questions to think about and our answers expressed how we felt." There were also opportunities for the students to express their perspectives, feelings, and attitudes on the issues encountered in the books. Nan stated in her final journal, "I could write how I felt and because that is the only way I can really learn other than a hands on activity." She then added, "Ms. Flynn also let us write whatever we wanted and that helped me express my feelings." The freedom to express oneself was a tenet of these lessons. The students had an outlet for their feelings and points of view that were neither graded nor shared except on a voluntary basis.

The art expression activities gave the students a method for articulating ideas and reflecting their personal style. The participants felt they were able to convey their attitudes and opinions through the varied artistic activities. Their creative and unique voices were heard through the detailed drawings, responses to going against the grain in activities involving sewing, dance, and role-playing. The students who worked together to create a dance in relation to the book, *Boy, Can He Dance!* (1993), combined talent, knowledge, and effort to make unique expressions while performing as a group. When role playing scenes from the story, *The Batboy and his Violin* (1993), the students were asked to read lines then as an aside, comment on the character's perspective and motivation behind her/his actions and attitudes. The students responded by saying, "I never thought about it from the dad or mom's point of view. Maybe if they could have talked it out, they could have understood everybody. That way, Reginald would have been able to do what he loved and please his dad at the same time." Charles shone more brightly than the others in artistic expression. His

talent provided him with opportunities to reflect his personal opinions and his voice resonated as he created and share his works of art. The “oohs and ahhs” of his classmates built his confidence and he was more willing to elaborate on a character or a situation after drawing or painting it. Nan, Allison, Charles, and Jon all stated that the art activities were a fun and creative way of expressing their feelings and ideas. As the lessons continued, the art revealed their changing attitudes and perceptions of characters. Initially the four students perceived females and males in mainly traditional roles as evidenced through the pre-intervention art assessment activity, but through the exposure to diverse characters and situations, they were able to go beyond the traditional and surface expectations.

In summary, literature has the power to move, motivate, question, affirm or disaffirm ideals, expectations, gender roles, and behaviors (Martinez & Nash, 1993; Russell, 2001; Temple, 1993). This belief has been espoused since the great libraries of Thebes were thriving and collecting words of wisdom within their walls (Rudman, 1995).

Language arts is the perfect vehicle for developing higher order thinking because

Literature - perhaps more than any other source of information - provides powerful models of problem-solving processes. It is full of characters who engage in effective and ineffective attempts at solving problems, who use incisive or fuzzy reasoning, and who rely on adequate or inadequate evidence....” (Beck, 1989, p. 680, 682).

Conclusions

The attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and expectations for the four participants were positively influenced through the reading and discussing of children's literature with characters in gender equitable roles. It can also be concluded that art reflection and writing activities coupled with literature circles and whole group discussions encourage listening, provide students with a voice, and give learners and outlet for their thoughts and feelings. In addition, high quality gender equitable literature, opportunities to reflect and respond to the characters and stories, and an open forum for dialogue contribute to the success of the gender equitable literature experience.

Support for attitude and perception changes was provided through the sharing and discussion of quality children's literature that engaged the students. The literature selected for the study was diverse, engaging, and varied in mood. There were stories filled with humor, sadness, triumph, and tenacity. The stories revolved around both female and male characters in times of crisis, personal exploration, success, and failure. The students exhibited the tenets of bibliotherapy (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000) when they identified with the characters and circumstances of the plot, related to the situation or characters on an emotional and personal level, and gained insight about others and themselves as a result.

Students participating in this study acknowledged the importance of gender equity, and they recognized the limitations gender stereotyping can exert on people's ambitions, interests, and behaviors. The participants looked within themselves for answers to the problems plaguing the characters, people within their environments, and themselves. This type of Social Reconstructivism (Grant & Sleeter, 1998) and Human Relations Approach (Grant & Sleeter, 1998) to learning connected to the theoretical framework and intentions of the study.

The organization of the learning environment also supported change through opportunities for constructive learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Kamii & Ewing, 1996). The students worked together and individually to form opinions, resolutions, and questions for discussion and analysis in relation to gender roles and expectations. Personal experiences and the vicarious experiences of the characters in the literature provided the participants with varied perspectives and opportunities to connect on a personal level with the story. The students felt comfortable relaying their experiences with others in their literature circles, journal writing, art expression activities, semi-structured interviews, and whole group discussions.

Implications

The insights revealed through this study present the opportunity to further reflect on several educational implications. First, learning in a constructivist environment offers a variety of opportunities for learners and educators. The power of community and personal and vicarious experiences shared, discussed, and reflected upon builds valuable schema upon which learners can base decisions, opinions, and questions.

Another implication offered by the findings is that children's literature can be a powerful tool to reach, stir, and motivate learners to think about gender roles and expectations. Students related to characters and situations in a non-threatening atmosphere and grew as members of a more equitable society.

Multiple forms of expression provide outlets for learners with varying strengths and interests. Learners were able to demonstrate their understanding and interpretations of characters, circumstances, and issues addressed within the literature and society as a whole. Students who were able to write, create, and discuss gender roles and expectations in an open forum and welcoming environment broadened their attitudes and perceptions in relation to gender.

Recommendations

Before teachers participate in this type of literature intervention, we suggest they reference the library publications such as *Booklist* and *Hornbook* for innumerable literature selections. These publications provide age range, synopsis, and information about the style and quality of the book. It is vital that teachers choose quality children's literature that not only teaches a lesson, but has the elements of an interesting and engaging storyline, well developed characters, and eye catching illustrations (Chamberlain & Leal 1999).

Another recommendation would be to incorporate pertinent statistics and personal accounts through guest speakers. These aspects would bring the issues of gender equity and gender stereotyping into a more global plane while relating it to their environments. Research on the part of students and teachers would be valuable for verifying the importance and need of the intervention. Contacting societies and organizations would also allow learners and teachers to actively participate in the change process.

Additional Studies

A number of additional studies are suggested by this multiple instrumental case study:

1. A longitudinal study investigating the effects of literature intervention as presented in this study.
2. A replication of this study to determine the effectiveness of the instructional design.

3. A descriptive study to determine the improvements made to writing expression skills by participating in a literature based intervention.

In conclusion, a literature intervention involving the reading, discussion, and reflection upon of children's literature with diverse, nontraditional characters is a viable means for positively impacting learners' attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and expectations. It provides opportunities for response, reflection, discourse, and creativity that should encourage learners' critical thinking and active response to issues in society. The following quote by Jean Piaget (as cited in Block, 1997) sums up the experience.

The principal goal of education is to create men [and women] who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done - men [and women] who are creative, inventive discoverers. The second goal of education is to form minds which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they are offered (p. 439).

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